DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 107 EC 131 360

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TITLE Teacher Identification of Behavior Problems Among Junior High School Students: A Preliminary Study.
PUB DATE Aug 80
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at a Topical Conference of The Council for Exceptional Children (Minneapolis, MN, August, 1980, Section Meeting 15).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attention; *Behavior Patterns; *Behavior Problems; Exceptional Child Research; Junior High Schools; *Student Teacher Relationship

ABSTRACT

The study examined factors which might be associated with teacher identification of behavior problems among 53 junior high school students. Teacher-student interaction profiles were compared to examine the differences between students identified as emotionally disturbed and nonidentified students. When the teacher was instructing, identified and nonidentified students displayed significantly different amounts of attending and nonattending behaviors in the regular classroom. Identified students attended only 70% of the time, while nonidentified students attended 90% of the time. However, when the teacher was engaged in noninstructional tasks, both groups of students attended to task almost 75% of the time. Likewise, during the noninstructional periods, both identified and nonidentified students scanned and socialized approximately 25% of the time. (SBH)

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TEACHER IDENTIFICATION OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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TEACHER IDENTIFICATION OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Teacher identification of emotionally disturbed children has generally been viewed as a comparative process. In each model of child evaluation, it is assumed that the child is the one to be judged. A child may be compared with a "stereotypical" emotionally disturbed child; with behaviors deemed typical of "normal" children; or with behaviors representative of an "ideal" child. If disturbance is to be detected, the disturbance is thought to be centered in the child. Disturbance is thus reduced to a single individual. "Although this conception of disturbance does not ignore components outside the individual... , the paradigm does lead to a minimization of the importance of the setting in interpreting the disturbance..." (Rhodes & Tracy, 1972, p. 574). The unspoken assumption is that the disturbance does not reside in the teachers, schools, community, or culture.

An alternative approach for identifying children who may display emotional or behavioral disorders is provided by the ecological model. Ecological assessments have been primarily concerned with examining the positive or negative interactions students encounter in various ecological niches. This method as well as modifications thereof (Prieto & Rutherford, 1977), has been shown to be very effective in focusing on multiple environments and interactions. The child alone is not considered the source of the "disturbance".

Regardless of the type of assessment used, teacher variables such as personal bias and expectations probably have a powerful influence. Following

this assumption, the information received from any assessment procedure (i.e. behavioral, ecological, psychodynamic) could be distorted as to what the child is actually doing or capable of accomplishing. Teacher judgements of student ability and performance have been shown to be influenced by a variety of variables unrelated to academic performance. Teacher bias concerning student race, dialect, and physical attractiveness significantly affect judgements made concerning student performance (DeMeis & Turner, 1978). Additional teacher variables which negatively affect teacher-student interactions are an inability to program appropriate educational goals for students (Raven, 1977) and hopelessness and despair (Christensen, Goula, Prosser & Sylvester, 1976). There are indications that a substantial percentage of classroom teachers experience mental/emotional disorders during their teaching careers (Shipley, 1961). A teacher who is experiencing emotional problems may be overly rigid, sarcastic, or threatening to pupils (Brodbelt, 1973). The child identified as emotionally disturbed in such an environment may simply be reacting to inappropriate teacher behavior.

Graubard (1973) has defined emotional disturbance as a variety of deviant behaviors which violate the perceiver's expectations of appropriateness and which the perceiver wishes to see stopped. Teachers act and react differentially to students because of their own expectations and biases. Thus, the child who is labeled emotionally disturbed deviates from the teacher's expectations of appropriateness.

Rubin and Balow (1978) found that during the first six years of elementary school, approximately 60% of a sample of 1,586 children were considered behavior problems by at least one teacher. In a discussion of these findings, the authors hypothesized that each teacher has "... his or her own set of expectations and definitions of normal behavior..." (p. 110). The interaction

between the teacher's expectations and the student's behavior creates a cycle. The student behaves and the teacher responds to that behavior as a result of the expectations held for the student. Teacher responses can be positive or negative, verbal or non-verbal. These responses then act as stimuli for student responses which then completes the cycle. For children identified as emotionally disturbed this cycle is generally negative in nature; that is, student behavior does not match teacher expectancy. This framework does not necessarily assume that student behavior is normal or deviant, or that teacher expectations are correct or incorrect, but that the two do not exist in harmony with each other.

The purpose of the present study was to examine factors which might be associated with teacher identification of behavior problems among junior high school students. Specifically, teacher-student interaction profiles were compared to examine the differences between students identified as emotionally disturbed and non-identified students.

Methodology

Subjects

Three junior high school mathematics classes were used to assess teacher-student interaction. Permission to record teacher behavior and student behavior was granted by both the building principals and classroom teachers. The sample included four teachers and 53 students in grades seven through nine. Seven students had been identified as emotionally disturbed and were receiving special services.

Instrumentation

The Teacher-Pupil Interaction Scale (Goodwin & Coates, 1971) was used to record teacher-student interactions. Four categories of teacher behavior

and four categories of student behavior were recorded, resulting in 16 possible interaction patterns. Teacher behavior included instructing, rewarding, non-attending, and disapproving. Student behavior included attending, scanning, socializing, and disrupting. Interactions were recorded using a time sampling technique.

Procedure

The teacher and each student were observed for six consecutive ten-second intervals. At the end of each interval, the observer simultaneously recorded both teacher behavior and student behavior. The observer continued to observe each student for one minute until the entire class had been recorded. To prevent experimenter bias, the identified students were unknown to the observers. Inter-rater reliability was approximately 85%. Goodwin and Coats (1971) note that 80% reliability is considered acceptable for this instrument.

Analysis of Data

A 16-square matrix was constructed, and the combined teacher-student interactions were recorded in each cell. For example, the total number of times the students were attending while the teachers were instructing was recorded in the first cell. The frequencies were then converted to percentages for ease of comparison between the identified and non-identified student samples. The proportions tests for independent samples was used to test significance (Ferguson, 1971).

Results

There were significant differences between the teacher-student interaction profiles of those students identified as emotionally disturbed and non-identified students. The two significant interactions were teacher instructing/student attending and teacher instructing/student scanning.

Insert Table 1 about here

As shown in Table 1 while the teacher was instructing, non-identified students attended significantly more (90%) than identified students (70%). Twenty percent more of the identified students' time was spent in non-attending activities while the teacher was instructing.

The other interaction that was significant was teacher instructing/student scanning. While the teacher was instructing, identified students were engaged in scanning behavior 28% of the time compared to 10% for non-identified students. Identified students were engaged in scanning behavior while the teacher was instructing almost three times as often as non-identified students.

Discussion

When the teacher was instructing, identified and non-identified students displayed significantly different amounts of attending and non-attending behaviors in the regular classroom. Identified students attended only 70% of the time, while non-identified students attended 90% of the time. However when the teacher was engaged in non-instructional tasks, e.g., during study periods, working with other students, both groups of students attended

to task almost 75% of the time. Likewise, during non-instructional periods both identified and non-identified students scanned and socialized approximately 25% of the time. It is suggested, therefore, that it may not be the type of behavior which the junior high school student displays, but when he displays it that distinguishes the identified child.

This view is supported by a previous investigation (Boomer & King, 1979) in which 200 regular classroom teachers were first asked to, "List the major behavior problems(s) in your classroom (if any), and then asked to, "describe how these behaviors interfere with you as a classroom teacher." The most frequently mentioned problems concerned student behavior while the teacher was instructing, e.g., interrupting, blurting out questions, not listening, and not following directions. It is suggested, therefore, that when the teacher is presenting a lesson or giving directions, student behavior which does not match teacher expectancy (teacher instructing/student attending) may be a significant factor in the identification of some students.

These findings as well as others (Bower & Lambert, 1962; Rubin & Balow, 1978; Wood & Zabel, 1978) demonstrate the need to examine and conceptualize emotional disturbance in a more complete and comprehensive manner. Focusing on teacher-student interaction results in a more complete and accurate description of behavior problems in the classroom.

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TABLE 1

Percent of Teacher-Student Interactions:

Identified vs Non-Identified Students

Teacher-Student Interaction	Percent of Total Interactions	
Teacher Instructing-Student Attending		
Identified (ED)	70	*
Non-Identified	90	
Teacher Instructing-Student Scanning		
Identified (ED)	28	**
Non-Identified	10	
Teacher Non-Attending-Student Attending		
Identified (ED)	73	
Non-Identified	74	
Teacher Non-Attending-Student Scanning		
Identified	24	
Non-Identified	18	
Teacher Non-Attending-Student Socializing		
Identified (ED)	03	
Non-Identified	08	

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$